

Bad Habits are Hard to Break

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Phoenix – The laws have changed, making it more difficult to do it. Taxes have increased, making it more expensive to do it. People are less tolerant about it, making it less comfortable to do it. Still, millions of Americans continue to use tobacco products every day. Almost 2,000 Maricopa County's employees join them.

But, there is hope and the Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program can help those people through the misconceptions, stress, and uncertainty of stopping the use of tobacco. The programs offered by the county will help employees break bad habits.

Chandra Lizarraga, a business Service Specialist with the Maricopa County Superintendent of Schools, is proof of the success of the techniques and encouragements that come from MACTUPP. After 29 years of smoking, she has been free of the habit for almost six years.

Donna Beedle, Manager of the tobacco use prevention program for the county, said, "Chandra is nothing short of inspirational," in discussing the effort of the 7-year county employee. She added, "She brought two people to sign-up for classes just last week. She spoke to MACTUPP staff about how the cessation classes educated, supported and financially assisted her in the quit process."

Tobacco use comes in many forms, from cigars and pipes to cigarettes. One of the most ignored uses,

according to Baseball Hall of Fame player and broadcaster Joe Garagiola, is smokeless tobacco. "It's a hidden epidemic," he told *Newsline*. Chewing tobacco and snuff products are "under the radar scope" for most anti-tobacco programs, according to the retired Scottsdale baseball great. "People are more concerned about second-hand smoke than spit tobacco," he complained, adding, "Smokeless tobacco is not harmless tobacco."

Ms. Lizarraga agrees. "All tobacco is bad, but the smokeless tobaccos are the most scary." Mr. Garagiola has worked with Major League Baseball to highlight the problems of smokeless tobaccos. "This is not a safe alternative to cigarettes," he firmly declared.

MACTUPP's website views smokeless tobacco as a serious health problem. It notes, "Spit, chew, snuff, dip, and smokeless tobacco are all terms used to describe ways tobacco is used in the mouth. Smokeless does not mean harmless. The dangers of smokeless tobacco are just as serious as those associated with cigarettes."

It doesn't matter how long the employee has been using the products or how early they started. Ms. Lizarraga started smoking when she was 13 years old. Despite some half-hearted attempts to quit, it wasn't until she realized it might be her pulling along an oxygen tank in order to breathe that she quit. "I just signed-up my sister and her friend for the program because I believe in it," she said. The county employee also noted, "I didn't want my children to follow the example I set by smoking."

More information about the program is available at www.mactupp.org. The Maricopa County Schools employee said, "The thought of quitting forever is harder to handle than the actual quitting." She encouraged employees who use tobacco products, or have loved ones who use, to contact MACTUPP. According to Ms. Beedle, "Chandra radiates enthusiasm and passion about the prospects of all smokers being able to quit."

(Taken from Maricopa County Newsline)